**Cultural Oppression; an Impediment to American Indian Education**

**EDCI 540**

**Week 4 writing assignment**

**Due Date 10/21/13**

**Paper by: Tait Rocksund**

**Professor: John Vollertsen**

American Indians have been subjected to cultural oppression since the settlement of European-Americans in North America. As the European-American population proliferated throughout the territory, the settlement of immigrant populations in the part of North America that is now known as the United States, led to displacement of American Indians. While being displaced from their native lands, American Indians were subjected to cultural assimilation; this was a direct attack on the livelihood and durability of their cultural heritage. As European-American culture became dominant in the United States and the rest of North America, specifically, American Indian tribes of United States were subjected to cultural oppression. In other words, the newfound dominant European-American culture was actively selecting against and suppressing American Indian culture.

One of the most crippling legislative acts to American Indian cultures was the Dawes Act of 1887, which led to the dissolution of tribal cultural legacies (Bryan Jr., 1996, p.10). The Dawes act was a direct assault on American Indian culture and the catalyst for the onset of lasting cultural oppression. "The purpose [of the Dawes Act] was clear: break up the reservation, destroy tribal culture and incorporate Indian people into American life as individual citizens," (p.10). After land was sectioned off and sold to White European-Americans, it became inevitable, that public education in the United States would soon become the vehicle to assimilate American Indians into the dominant culture.

With the occurrence of forced cultural assimilation, a blatant disregard for unique cultural heritage was ingrained within the substance of educational history of American Indians in the United States. As public school and boarding schools were used to carry out this cultural assimilation, the past and current culture of school for American Indians has lasting connections to the pains of lost culture and land. Therefore, the history of how American Indians fused into the institution of education in America has an overwhelming negative connotation.

In current times, the lingering effects of historical cultural oppression still shapes the modern state of American Indian education in the U.S. "Some of the problems in our communities are directly related to historic oppression, like being forced to attend boarding school," (Bergstrom et. al, 2003, p.49). Sometimes, events are so negative, that they are nearly impossible to shake as time moves forward. The implementation of cultural assimilation through the medium of education is one of those events for American Indians. "Assimilationist education policies were implemented to remove any vestiges of of tribal cultures in an effort to "Americanize" tribal members," (Cleary & Peacock, 1998, p.63). The cultural oppression of assimilation led to future issues with American Indian behaviors, including the rebel against mainstream culture leading to "problems with alcohol and high rates of suicide" (p.63). The impacts of European-American oppression on American Indian culture are irreversible.

However, despite obvious effects of cultural assimilation on American Indian culture, it is wrong to lay all the blame European colonialism (Cleary & Peacock, 1998, p.61). The truth is, there have been instances of American Indians enabling their sense of oppression. For example, an American Indian parent who lays sole blame on the school system and institutions of government for family struggles is not actively contributing to the resolution of his or her problems. That individual is enabling future failures by not participating in the betterment of his or her child's education and future. With that said, by acknowledging the occurrence of this type of behavior, it is that much more clear that cultural oppression of American Indians continues to effect people.

Despite the negative history of American Indian cultural oppression, there is hope for the future. Many reservations are now offering competitive educations at tribal colleges. Furthermore, there is a modern movement for the retention and education of historical tribal cultures and languages. This movement has led to " a growing number of success stories throughout American Indian country," (Cleary & Peacock, 1998, p.95). As people become more educated about how to combat cultural oppression and the cultural oppression of American Indians, more stories of human triumph will emerge.

References:

Bergstrom, A., Cleary, L. M., & Peacock, T. D. (2003). *The Seventh Generation: Native Students Speak About Finding the Good Path.* Charleston, WV.

Bryan Jr., W. L. (1996). *Montana Indians: Yesterday and Today.* Helena, MT: American & World Geographic Publishing.

Cleary, L. M. & Peacock, T. D. (1998). *Collected Wisdom.* Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.